THE USE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES IN MANAGING THE OPERATIONS OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES IN BENUE STATE

MAGARET PUGHUR
Department of Public Relations
Rev, Father Moses Orshio Adasu University Makurdi
Pughurmagaret@gmail.com ORCID ID 0009-0007-8920-1667

CHILE TERNGU CALEB
Department of Strategic Communication
Rev. Father Moses Orshio Adasu University Makurdi
ternguchile@gmail.com ORCID ID 0009-0002-3432-2334

EMMANUEL OMULA
Department of Mass Communication
Topfaith University Mkapatak
e.omula@topfaith.edu.ng ORCID ID 0009-0004-8450-8369

DOI: https://doi.org/10.64633/wissj.v10i3.18

Keywords

Public Relations, Managing, Strategies, Operations

Abstract

Research Problem:
Agricultural cooperative societies play important rolesin food security ofnations.These cooperative need effective communication to be able to relate with their various stakeholders. This study investigated public relations strategies and activities that agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State used and could use to achieve effective communication.
Method/Theory:
Survey research method was employed and questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The analysis was done using the 5 point Likertscale.The study is anchored on Excellence Theory, which explains how organisations can achieve their communication objectives.
Results:
Findings revealed that, agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State did not use public relations strategies effectively in their operations.This is evident in Table 1 with a mean score of 2.8 which was rejected. It was further revealed that, public relations strategy like media relations was not used by agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State. Agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State would need to apply the principles of Excellence theory and also apply the right public relations strategies at the right time, to s to do better.
Key Contribution to Knowledge:

The study has shown that, media relations was not considered a significant public relations strategy by agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State, this is perhaps because, the publicrelations units were not manned by qualified public relations professionals.

Recommendation:

For agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State to do better, they must engage in media relations because media relations was not considered a significant public relations strategy by cooperatives in Benue State.

Introduction

Some people believe that, the job of a public relations officer can be performed by any tom dick and harry. This assumption is wrong in that, is only a trained public relations officer that carry out effectively certain public relations functions. The ability of agricultural cooperative societies to communication effectively with their various stakeholders is something that has been of concern to researchers and scholars.Public relations is one way of achieving effective communication. Agricultural cooperative societies are recognised to play treasured contributions in developing agriculture in the world especially in industrialised societies. The contributions of these cooperative societies may either be in forms of suppliers of farming requisites, marketers of agricultural produce or making available agro services such as storage and transportation as well as marketing. In Nigeria, for example, successive governments have equally recognised the significance of agricultural cooperative societies to achieve target goals in the agricultural production-chain. This is demonstrated through governments' support of the sustainable growth and development of the agricultural sector. Activities of agricultural cooperatives may prompt soft loans and subsidised farm inputs to be acquired by farmers-mainly through their activities.

Agricultural cooperatives societies have been touted as the appropriate vehicle for harnessing and pulling the resources of millions of small-scale agricultural producers together to considerably benefit from large scale production. Similarly, cooperative societies are one of the most effective vehicles for efficient mobilisation of agricultural production resources and accelerated rural development across the globe (Ogbeide, 2015, Oladejo, 2013).Just as other social institutions, agricultural cooperative societies measure their success by how well they employ appropriate managerial or administrative techniques to help them achieve their respective set-goals. Effective communication approaches or activities are part of the techniques. This, therefore, calls for adoption of appropriate communication activities such as public relations practice. Matthew &Ogedebe (2012) affirm that in the 21st century, public relations is now an integral part of any successful organisation with agricultural cooperative societies, inclusive.Furthermore, Elijah, Ogbu & Aer (2018) affirm that, public relations practice can enhance successes in social organisations or institutions, which is the fact that the activities provide a 'fertile' ground for conducive operations. This is in tandem with public relations' basic objective of creating good relations between the general public and an organisation.

The practice of agricultural cooperative societies involves human activities hence proper communication plays an integral role in helping them to achieve their set goals and objectives.

Some challenges experienced by most of these societies are predicated by their neglect of communication. In this wise, cooperative societies, no doubt, require effective communication through public relations activities. This is because, public relations professionals handle corporate communication activities of organisations to enable them achieve their set goals and objectives (Asemah,2021).In affirmation on how public relations, has overtime, helped organisations such as agricultural cooperatives to survive and thrive, Bass (2017) has stated that, building and changing behaviour through dialogical information sharing are at the core of successful public relations programmes by ensuring that social institutions not only survive but thrive. Agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State can dialogue with their audience members through public relations. Such dialogues can be used to create understand and resolve misunderstandings. This is so because, the basic philosophy of public relations is effective interactions with both internal and external publics. Ochonogor&Ikpegbu (2017) note that, information, especially as provided by organisations including agricultural cooperative societies using public relations strategies about agriculture, has been and can be disseminated through communication channels or avenues for information sharing in order to sensitize relevant publics on agricultural development activities and programmes.

The foregoing connotes that,public relations is one way through which agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State can effectively interact with their various stakeholders.It is important to note that, effective communication through public relations is essential to the growth and development of agricultural cooperative societies in Benue in particular and the world in general. Njoku (2016) looked at the, *effectiveness of radio-agricultural farmer programme in technology transfer among rural farmers in Imo State, Nigeria.* The obvious gap in Njoku's study is that it focused on radio as a medium of mass communication and not the communication adjunct of public relations, which is the independent variable in the present study. Again, the study was not specific to farmer-members of agricultural cooperative societies but farmers in general.Samloco (2016) looked at the use of public relations strategies by commercial banks between 2004-2009. The identified gap in this study is that it focused on recapitalisation and the timeframe was 2004-2009.To bridge this gap the current study focused on using public relations strategies for growth and development.

Statement of the Problem

This study sought to find out public relations strategies that can be used by agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State, and to also investigate how frequent agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State engage in public relations practice. This is so because, public relations is a strategic communication that is intended to ensure two-way communication between agricultural cooperative societies and their various stakeholders. Two-way communication is fundamental to the success of cooperative societies in Benue State.

Objectives of the Study

1.) To ascertain the knowledge and level of awareness o public relations strategies used in managing agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State?

2.) To determine how often public relations strategies are used in managing agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State?

Research Method

The study made use of survey research method. The use of survey research method for this study finds relevance to this work since it entails getting people's feelings, opinions and views. Consequently, the study used questionnaire to collect the needed quantitative data from members of agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State. The population of this study comprises all members of registered agricultural cooperative societies that are operational in Benue State. The document obtained from Benue State Ministry of Rural Development and Cooperative showed that, there are one hundred and sixty-four (164) agricultural cooperative societies with ten thousand, two hundred and seventy-six [10,276] members.

Theoretical Frame Work

Excellence Theory

This study is anchored on Excellence Theory, which was developed in 1985 as a result of a fifteen-year research programme, commissioned by the Research Foundation of the International Association of Business Communications (LABC). Rhee (2004) considers this theory as an immense study in public relations, which can be seen as an integration of strategic management theories of public relations into a greater whole the study was carried out by a team of six researchers (that is, J, Grunig, L, Grunig, Dozier, Ehling, Repper and White) who began their research by addressing the question posed; how, why and to what extent does communication contribute to the achievement of organisational objectives? They also asked what they considered the 'excellent question': How must public relations be practiced and the communication function organised for it to contribute mostly to organisational effectiveness?

In his contribution to Excellence Theory, Tyma (2008) explains that the theory demonstrates how excellent public relations is able to interact and work with both internal and external publics, recognising that publics are not merely passive audiences, accepting messages in a hegemonic structure, but that each public that comes into contact with messages in viable and enfranchised with agency. Grunig (2000) in Tyma (2008, p. 193) had earlier defended the relevance of this theory thus: "The excellence theory is in a position from which public relations can be practiced, ethically as well as offer launching point for collaboration with larger social democratic structure." Through a combination of survey and qualitative research, the team identified fourteen generic principles of excellent Public Relations, which they later consolidated the following (Vercic&Grunig, 1996 in Rhee, 2014). The following are the principles:

i. Involvement of Public Relations in Strategic Management: An organisation that practices public relations strategically develops programmes to communicate with strategic publics, both external and internal that provides the greatest threats to and opportunities for the organisation.

ii. Empowerment of Public Relations in the Dominant Coalition or a Direct Reporting Relationship to Senior Management: In effective organisations, the senior public relations person is part of or has access to the group or senior managers with greatest power in the organisation.

iii. Integrated Public Relations Function: All public relations functions are integrated into a single department or have a mechanism to coordinate the departments. Only in an

integrated system of public relations is it possible for public relations to develop new communication programmes for changing strategic publics.

iv. Public Relations is a Management Function Separate from other Functions: Many organisations splinter the public relations function by making it a supporting tool for other departments such as marketing, human resources, law or finance. When the public relations functions are sublimated to other functions, it cannot move communication resources from one strategic public to another as an integrated public relations function can.

v. Public Relations Unit Headed by a Manager Rather than a Technician: Communication technicians are essential to carry out day-to-day communication activities. However, excellent public relations units must have at least one senior communication manager to manage conflict and improve understanding with strategic publics.

vi. A Symmetrical System of Internal Communication: Excellent organisations have decentralised management structures that give autonomy to employees and allow them to participate in decision making. They also have participative, symmetrical systems of internal communication with employees that increases job satisfaction because employee goals are incorporated into the organisational mission.

vii. Knowledge Potential for Management Role and Symmetrical Public Relations: Excellent programmes are staffed by professionals-people who are educated in the body of knowledge and who are active in professional associations and read professional literature.

viii. Diversity Embodied in all Roles: The principle of requisite variety states that effective organisations have as much diversity inside the organisation as in the environment. Excellent public relations includes both men and women in all roles, as well as practitioners of different racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

ix. Organisational Context for Excellence: Excellent public relations departments are nourished by participative rather than authoritarian cultures, activist pressure from the environment, and organic rather than mechanical management structures.

This theory is relevant to this study as it provides guidelines on how public relations should be practiced. Agricultural cooperative societies Benue State can therefore apply the principles of this theory to enhance their growth. The theory emphasises that, public relations practitioners should always ensure that there is always a two-way communication between an organisation and its publics. This gives room for feedback on messages sent out from an organisation.

Literature Review

Public Relations Strategies and Management of Agricultural Cooperative Societies

Governments and other stakeholders in the agricultural sector such as policy makers, planners and administrators are increasingly appreciating the fact that communication activities such as public relations is highly essential to the process of development of the sector.Information sharing or communication in general and that of agricultural information in particular, as a resource for sustainable agricultural development, has today gained considerable ground across the global society. Effective communication is seen as an essential tool for the establishment and maintenance of good social and working relationships and it

enables people to exercise control over their environment.The purpose of communication is to bring about change of attitude, knowledge, skills and aspiration of the receivers (Agwu, Ekueme & Anyanwu, 2008). The fore going implies that, as human beings we do not just talk because we want to talk. We talk in order to achieve a goal or set objectives. In view of the above it can be said that, effective communication by agricultural cooperative society in Benue State should be planned. This planned communication can come in the form of public relations. This is true because, public relation is a deliberate planned and sustained effort that is intended to not only to establish a mutual relationship but to also maintain it.

It is important to note here that, one of the characteristics of effective communication in relation to public relations is to always ensure that, a two-way communication exist between agricultural cooperative societies and their various publics. Two-way communication is a public relations strategy that ensures a constant but mutual flow of information from an organisation to its publics. It is through two-way communication that agricultural cooperative societies in Benue will get to know about public perception and public opinion towards them. This is so, because two-way communication is an avenue through which agricultural cooperative societies in Benue can get feedback from their stakeholders and vice versa. Such feedback can be used to enhance performance

Talking about the tools public relations uses in effective communication, Ochonogor&Ikpegbu (2017) note that "Information about agriculture has been and can be disseminated through the mass media and other avenues for information sharing to sensitise the people on agricultural development and programmes (p.169)". In light of the above it can be said that, public relations channels such as: radio, television, newspapers, newsletter, and social media platforms can be used to reach target audience of agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State. This is so because, in developing countries like Nigeria, various communication tools are being used to convey agricultural information to stakeholders in the agricultural sector. Giving credence to the preceding point, Dare (1990), cited in Agwu, Ekueme & Anyanwu (2018) notes that, these communication media include farm magazine, leaflets, newsletters, newspapers, pamphlets, radio and television, among others. Agwu et al further note that radio just as other communication media can lead to effective adoption of agricultural innovations among farmers in Nigeria. In essence, with the use of public relations strategy of media relation, agricultural cooperative societies can leverage on the benefits accruable the use of the strategy. This shows that,besides two-way communication media relations is another public relations strategy that agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State can take advantage of.

In the 21st century mobile phones have become invaluable means of sharing agricultural information. There is no gainsaying the fact that, mobile phones today provide platformsthrough which farmers share and get information about agriculture. Farmers nowadays use mobile phones for several reasons. Some use it for getting the price of product from market while others directly communicate with customers for selling their goods at better price. The use of mobile phones in sharing agricultural information is captured in Ifeanyi-Obi &Iferobia (2024) who aver that, mobile phone is key to information sharing among rural farmers (p.1) Using mobile phones information about agriculture can come in the form of WhatsApp Messages, Facebook messages, YouTube Videos, Instagram Videos TikTok videos and

even text in Twitter (X). Using these platforms is always be a problem to rural farms who are either faced with the problem of poor internet connectivity or near absence of electricity to power their phones. This assertion is echoed in Ifeanyi-Obi &Iferobia (2024) who after a study recommended improved power supply by responsible agencies in local communities to support mobile phone use for agricultural information sharing among rural farmers.Be that as it may be, agricultural cooperatives in Benue State can still us mobile phones in the dissemination of information.

The operations of agricultural cooperative societies involve human activities hence communication plays an integral role in making them achieve their set-objectives. Public relations practitioners handle corporate communication activities of organisations to enable them to achieve their set objectives. This assertion holds true in that, Matthew &Ogedebe (2013) note that, in the 21st century, public relations is now an integral part of any successful organisations including agricultural cooperative societies

With the important rolesagricultural cooperative societies play in developing the economy of a nation, their operational practice has to be properly built and maintained – considering that success in social endeavours is what public relations is all about. In view of the above, Oladejo (2013) posits that, public relations strategies employed by professionals can help to interpret agricultural cooperative societies to their publics and thus positively promote both their operational endeavours and image/reputation, which would in turn enhance their growth. Giving credence to the preceding point, Sequeira & Dhriti (2015) outlined the following basic public relations roles that can be appropriately used for growth and development of organisations including agricultural cooperative societies:

Advocacy: This is the use of resources and information accordingly to facilitate the needed change among agricultural cooperative societies. This can be done through either an individual or group of individuals, which could be by way of sharing communication contents for the purpose of influencing or controlling others. In advocacy, the desired action is prompted towards changing the policies, positions or programmes of agricultural cooperative societies or any type oforganisation or individual (Sequeira& Dhriti, 2015). Sometimes the change is intended to give the publics what they desire. Changes are also meant to improve performance. It is important to note here that, sometimes changes result from the feedback that organisations get from their publics.

Employee Relations: Employees are among an organisation's most important resources and considered as most valuable assets. The nature of work performed by persons employed by agricultural cooperative societies has direct impact on their efficiency. In this wise, maintaining healthy employee relations in any organisation, is a pre-requisite for achieving growth and success. Employee relations is a broad term that incorporates many issues from collective bargaining, negotiations, employee legislation to more recent considerations such as work-life balance, equal opportunities and managing diversity. It comprises the practices of initiatives for ensuring that employees are happy and are productive (Sequeira & Dhriti, 2015). Employee relations is therefore, concerned with maintaining employee-employer relations, which contributes to satisfactory productivity, increase in employee morale and motivation.

Two-way communication, building relationships, involvement in tactical

administration, and recognition of effective communication are critical management functions that facilitate all other management functions, they are essential occupation of the practice of public relations.

With respect to public relations, relationship management is the development, maintenance, growth, and nurturing of mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their significant publics (Hassan, 2014 in Chile, Onyilo&Aer, 2021).Kehinde&Igbozuruike (2016) hold that there is a positive relationship between good public relations practice and satisfaction of individuals such as members of agricultural cooperative societies and that positive relationships,facilitate patronage. The foregoing suggests that, relationship building is the core of public relations practice. This is so because, the relationship is intended to ensure continuous patronage and also portray the organisation as one that is socially responsible.

In light of the above Carpenter (2005) cited in Leva, Onyilo&Aer (2024) emphasised that, for any organisation such as cooperative societies to be effective, corporate social responsibility has to start at the top and permeate all aspects of the operation until it becomes part of the fabric of the organisational culture. Corporate social responsibility cannot exist as an isolated strategy, someone at the top has to believe in it, see the benefits, and feel passionate that it is 'the right thing to do'. This is to say that, even though the public relations unit is to some extent responsible for the corporate social responsibility activities of agricultural cooperative societies, the public relations unit would need the support and approval of those at the top echelon of management.

Sample Size Determination

The sample size of this study is 400. This was determined using Araoye's (2006) sample size determination formula, which can be used when a population size is greater than 10,000 (>10,000). Since the population of this study is 10,276 and greater than 10,000 (10,276 > 10,000), the formula is used. Below is the statistical explanation:

$$n = \frac{Z^2pq}{d^2}$$

Therefore, where:

n = desired sampled size (where population is > 10,000)

Z = the standard deviation usually set at 1.96 since a significant level of 95% is desired.

p = the proportion in the target population estimated to have a particular characteristic under study.

d = IOP (that is, the proportion of the population that does not share characteristics under study).

d = degree of accuracy desired.

Thus:

Z = 1.96 level of significant, which could be approximated to be 2

p = 50% = 0.50

q = (1-P) = 0.5

Therefore,

$$n = \frac{Z^2P^2}{d^2}$$

now becomes:

$$n = \frac{(1.96)2\ (0.05)\ (0.5)}{(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{4\times0.50\times0.5}{0.0025} \quad \Big| \quad n = \underline{\underline{400}}$$

Presentation of Findings

Table 1: Opinions of Respondents on Agricultural Cooperative Societies in Benue and Awareness of Public Relations

Statement: Cooperative Societies in Benue State have knowledge of PR Practice Frequency								
	SA(5)	A(4)	Neutral (3)	D(2)	SD(1)	TWV	MI	Decision
Benue North West	80(52%)	48 (32%)	0(0%)	20(13%)	4(3%)	636	4.2	Accepted
Benue North East	32(24%)	90(67%)	0(0%)	10(7.5%)	2(1.5%)	542	4.0	Accepted
Benue South	16	86	0	4	0	432	4.1	Accepted
Total	128(32.6%)	224(57.1%)	0(0%)	34(8.6%)	6(1.5%)	1628	4.1	Accepted
Agricultural Cooperative Societies in Benue State Engage in Public Relations Practice								
Benue North West	50(33%)	70(46%)	10(7%)	22(14%)	0(0%)	684	4.5	Accepted
Benue North East	12(9%)	112(84%)	0(0%)	6(4%)	4(3%)	528	3.9	Accepted
Benue South	6(6%)	94(88%)	2(2%)	4(4%)	0	420	3.9	Accepted
Total	68(17.3%)	276(70.4%)	12(3.2%)	32(8.1%)	4(1%)	1632	4.1	Accepted

Are PR Strategies Relevant to the Growth of Cooperative Societies in Benue State

Benue North West	76(50%)	64(42%)	12(8%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	672	4.4	Accepted
Benue North East	78(58.2%)	56(41.8%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	614	4.5	Accepted
Benue South	38(36%)	68(64%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	462	4.3	Accepted
Total	192(49%)	188(48%)	12(3%)	090%)	0(0%)	1748	4.4	Accepted

Do Agricultural Cooperative Societies in Benue use Public Relations Strategies Effectively

Benue North West	24(16%)	20(13%)	26(17%)	78(51%)	4(3%)	238	2.9	Rejected
Benue North East	10(7.5%)	4(3%)	70(52.2%)	46(34.3%)	4(3%)	372	2.8	Rejected
Benue South	0(0%)	10(9.4%)	68(64.2%)	28(26.4%)	0(0%)	300	2.8	Rejected
Total	34(8.6%)	34(8.6%)	164(42%)	152(38.8%)	8(2%)	1110	2.8	Rejected

Source: Field Survey 2025

Table 1 provides information about the level of awareness of public relations activities by agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State. Findings revealed that, agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State have knowledge of public relations. This is true because, out of the 392 respondents sampled across the three geo political zones, 128(32.6%) and 224(57.1%), strongly agreed and agreed respectively that; agricultural cooperative societies have knowledge of public relations. This implies that, 89.7% of the entire respondents held this view. Findings further showed that, not only are agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State aware of public relations but they also engage in public relations activities. This was the opinion of all the respondents across the three geo political zones. Table 1 showed that while 68 (17.3%) of the entire respondents strongly agreed, another 276 (70.4%) of the whole respondents also agreed so. Based on the views of majority respondents (87.7%) it can be established that, agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State engage in public relations activities.

Again, data in Table 1 have shown that, the use of public relations strategies is important to the growth and development of agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State. The mean

score of 4.4 shows that, the use of public relations strategies is a significant factor in the growth and development of agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State. Equally important is the fact that, the percentage score revealed that, out of the 392 respondents sampled, a huge majority 380 representing (97%) were of the opinion that; public relations strategies can contribute to the growth of agricultural cooperative societies. The opinion of the 3% respondents that held divergent view cannot hold against that of the majority. It can be concluded based on the view of majority respondents (97%) that, public relations strategies are relevant to the growth of agricultural cooperative societies. However, Table 1 has also shown that, agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State do not make effective use of public relations activities in their operations. This is so because, while 164 respondents (42%) were neutral as to whether agricultural cooperative societies use public relations strategies effectively, another 152 respondents (38.8%) disagreed that, agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State do not make effective use of public relations strategies. Besides the opinions of 42% and 38.8% of the respondents who were neutral and disagreed respectively, there is also a mean score of 2.8 which again showed that, agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State did not make effective use of public relations strategies.

Table 2: Respondents Views of PR Strategies used in Managing Agricultural Cooperatives Societies in Benue State

Statement: Do Cooperative Societies in Benue State Engage in Media Relations

Frequency	SA(5)	A(4)	Neutral(3)	D(2)	SD(1)	TWV	MI	Decision
Benue North West	26(17%)	26(17%)	76(50%)	24(16%)	0	510	3.3	Rejected
Benue North East	6(4.5%)	26(19.4%)	90(67.2%)	10(7.4%)	2(1.5%)	426	3.2	Rejected
Benue South	4(4%)	34(32%)	68(64%)	0(0%0	0	360	3.3	Rejected
Total	36(9%)	86(21.9%)	234(60%)	34(8.6%)	2(0.5%)	1298	3.3	Rejected

Employee Relations is a PR Strategy of Agricultural Cooperatives in Benue State

Benue North West	30(19.7%)	90(59%)	8(5.3%)	24(16%)	0(0%)	582	3.8	Accepted
Benue North East	20(15%)	104(77.6%)	0(0%)	6(4.4%)	4(3%)	532	3.9	Accepted
Benue South	0(0%)	100(94%)	2(2%)	2(2%)	2(2%)	412	3.8	Accepted
Total	50(12.8%)	294(75%)	10(2.6%)	32(8.1%)	6(1.5%)	1474	3.7	Accepted

Is Financial Relations part of the PR Strategy of Agricultural Cooperatives in Benue State

Benue North West	52(34.2%)	60(39.5%)	14(9%)	22(14.4%)	4(2.6%)	590	3.8	Accepted
Benue North East	6(4.5%)	104(77.6%)	2(1.4%)	16(12%)	6(4.5%)	490	3.7	Accepted
Benue South	8(7%)	94(89%)	0(0%)	2(2%)	2(2%)	422	3.9	Accepted
Total	66(17%)	258(66%)	16(4%)	40(10%)	12(3%)	1502	3.8	Accepted

Source: Field Survey 2025

Data in Table 2 point out public relations strategies that can contribute to the growth and development of agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State. Findings have shown that, agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State do not leverage on media relations as a public relations strategy. It was discovered that, a huge majority of the entire respondents 234 representing (60%) were neutral. Also, the mean score of 3.3 which was rejected showed that, media relations was not considered a significant public relations strategy by agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State in contributing to their growth. This is so because, the cooperative societies did little of or nothing about media relations in their operations. Furthermore, Table 2 has shown that employee relations is a public relations strategy that can contribute immensely to the growth of agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State. This is so because, a great majority of the entire respondents 12.8% and 75% strongly agreed and agreed so respectively. It can therefore be established based on the views of 87.8% of the entire respondents and a mean score of 3.7, that employee relations is significant to the growth of agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State

Findings have shown that, financial public relations is another important public relations strategy that agricultural cooperatives in Benue State used in their operations. The mean score of 3.8 shows that, financial public relations is a significant public relations strategy that can contribute to the growth of agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State. The percentage score revealed that 17% and 66% of the entire respondents across the three geo political zones, strongly agreed and agreed respectively that, financial public relations is fundamental to the success of agricultural cooperative societies. This implies that,83% of

the entire respondents answered in affirmation to the relevance of financial public relations as a public relations strategy that is significant to growth of agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State.

Discussion of Findings

The first objective of the study was to ascertain the knowledge and level of awareness of public relations strategies used in managing agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State?Finding revealed that, agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State have knowledge of public relations practice. This implies that cooperative societies in Benue State have knowledge of public relations practice. This is evident on Table 1, where a huge majority of the respondents 89.7% strongly agreed and agreed so respectively. Data in Table 1, have shown that, the application of public relations strategies is relevant to the growth of agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State. This assertion holds true in that, in Table 1, majority of the respondents, 97% agreed so. This is in tandem with the earlier submission of Ochonogor&Ikpegbu (2017) who argue that "Information about agriculture has been and can be disseminated through the mass media and other avenues for information sharing to sensitise the people on agricultural development and programmes (p.169)".It can be established based on the views of majority respondents in Table 1, that the application of public relations strategies by agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State is essential for their growth and development.

It was further revealed that, agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State, do not only have knowledge of public relations practice but they also engage in public relations practice. This means agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State did apply public relations strategies in their public relations campaigns. This was the submission of 87.7% of the entire respondents in Table 1. Finding however, revealed that, even though agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State did apply public relations strategies in their public relations campaign, the level of application was not as effective as it should be. This implies that, agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State did not effectively apply public relations strategies in their campaigns. This is evident in Table 1, where 42% and 38.8% of the whole respondents were neutral and disagreed respectively. Equally important is also a mean score of 2.8 which was rejected. This provides insight into the problem the study investigated. It can therefore be established that agricultural cooperative societies in Benue did not use public relations strategies effectively.

The second objective was to determine how often public relations strategies were used by agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State. Findings have shown public relations strategies, that agricultural cooperative societies in Benue Stateused in their public relations campaigns. This is evident in Table 2, where majority of the respondents agreed that cooperative societies in Benue Stateused public relations strategies such as financial relations and employee relations in their operations. This also provides insight into the problem the study investigated. The need for employee relations as public relation strategy is echoed in, Sequeira & Dhriti (2015) who state that, employee relations is a broad term that incorporates many issues from collective bargaining, negotiations, employee legislation to more recent considerations such as work-life balance, equal opportunities and managing diversity. It comprises the practices of initiatives for ensuring that employees are happy and are productive (Sequeira & Dhriti, 2015). It was however, discovered that, media relations is a public relations strategy that agricultural

cooperative societies in Benue State did not make adequate use of in their operations. This is true in that findings in Table 2 revealed a mean of 3.3 which was rejected. The mean of 3.3 shows that either the cooperative societies did not consider media relations a significant factor or they have not been able to make adequate use of media relations as a public relations strategy.

Conclusion

No organisation, individual or government can exist in isolation. This is so because, an individual or organisation cannot provide for its self, all that it requires to function effectively. For organisations like agricultural cooperative societies to function effectively, they need the support of their various stakeholder(publics). To ensure that agricultural cooperative societies enjoy the support and goodwill of the publics, there is need for constant interaction between them and their publics. This interaction builds relationship and also helps agricultural cooperative societies to manage their images. Hence the need for effective public relations.

Based on the above observation, it is pertinent to conclude that, the use of public relations strategies is critical to the growth of agricultural cooperative societies, however, to achieve desired resultspublic relations strategies should be used frequently, effectively and timely.

Recommendations

(1) For agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State to do better, they must engage in media relations, because it was not considered significant public relations strategy.by cooperatives in Benue State.

(2)) Agricultural cooperative societies in Benue State need to have specific public relations units,headed by qualified public relations officer, as this would enable them use public relations strategies effectively.

References

Chile, C. T., Onyilo, M. A. & Aer, G. (2020).Using public relations for image management in governance. In Aliede, J. A., Chile, C. &Achioko, T. (Eds.). *Public relations governance and national development.* Ahmadu Bello University Press Ltd.45-60.

Elijah, F. A, Ogbu, B. E. & Aer, G. (2018). An evaluation of Benue State government adoption of public relations in managing herders/farmers security challenge. *Mkar Journal of Media and culture,* 4(1).

Ifeanyi-Obi,C.C. &Iferobia,G.C.(2024).Assessmentof mobile phone usage for agricultural information sharing among rural farmers in agricultural zones one Rivers.*Journalof Agricultural Extension.(28)4 https://journal.aesonnigeria.org*

Kehinde, O. J. and Igbozuruike, R. C. (2016). Public relations as a tool for effective healthcare management. *Innovative Journal of Business and Management*, 5(4), 81 – 88.

Mathew, J. &Ogedebe, P. M. (2012). The role of public relations in a non-governmental organization: A case study of ten selected Christianchurches in Maiduguri. Unpublished Thesis.

Ochonogor, C. I. &Ikpegbu, E. O. U. (2017). Redirecting Nigeria youths to agriculture through communication for national development. *The Nigerian Journal of Communication (14) 1. 163 – 196.*

Ogbeide, O. A. (2015). An assessment of co-operative society as a strategy for rural development in Edo State of Nigeria. *The Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 10 (1), 94 – 108.

Oladejo, M. O. (2013). Stakeholders' perception of cooperative societies as a micro-credit delivery channel in the Nigerian financial sector reform era. *International Review of Management and Business Research,* 2(2), 457 – 469.

Rhee, T. (2004). The employee –public – organisationchain in relationship management: A Study of sixteen government organisation. Unpublished Thesis, University of Maryland, College Park.

Samloco S. (2016). The use of public relations strategies by commercial banks during the recapitalizations of the banking sector in Nigeria (2004 – 2009). *New Media and Mass Communication, 49, 13 – 25*

Sequeira, A. H. & Dhriti A. (2015). Employee relations &its impact on employee

performance: A Case Study, retrieved from:

http://www/researchgate.net/publication/276026663 on 20/11/2017.

Tyma, A. W. (2008). Public relations through a new lens – critical paxisvia the "excellence theory" *International Journal of Communication* (2), 193 – 205.